West Slope Watershed

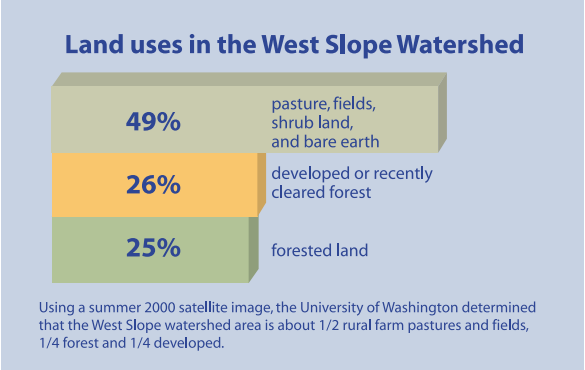
Description of the watershed

Four small creek basins form the West Slope watershed. The creeks – Whipple, Flume, Gee, and Allen Canyon — drain a 40-square-mile area from Interstate 5 west to the Columbia River flood plain. Whipple and Flume Creeks flow west into Lake River. Gee Creek flows from the hills along I-5, through the city of Ridgefield and into a series of lakes in the Columbia River flood plain. Allen Canyon Creek begins near the Ridgefield off-ramp from I-5 and flows through Mud Lake into the Lewis River. Elevations range from 450 feet in headwater areas of Whipple Creek to near sea level at Lake River. Gee Creek is the longest stream at ten miles and two-mile long Flume Creek is the shortest

Land uses range from rural to urban. Further urban development is expected along I-5, in upper Whipple Creek, and in Ridgefield.

Lower parts of the creeks generally flow through wooded canyons that provide a measure of protection from clearing and development. The Whipple, Gee, and Allen Canyon Creek basins all include moderate to large sized parks or wildlife refuges. The lowest segment of Gee Creek is inside the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Abrams Park in Ridgefield is a popular access point for Gee Creek. Mud Lake Park, in lower Allen Canyon Creek, is an undeveloped forest and wetland area open to the public. Whipple Creek Regional Park is a 300-acre forested park where Whipple Creek and its tributaries are accessible by trail.

The West Slope streams do not have significant salmon habitat due to their small size and relatively poor health.



How healthy are the West Slope watershed creeks?

The combined effects of urbanization and farming have degraded the entire lengths of the West Slope creeks — fecal bacteria, water chemistry, stream dwelling insects — indicate poor to very poor health. Observation suggests that runoff from developed areas and fields is causing increased erosion and sediment deposition, both of which harm stream habitat.

Although there is significant recent information for Gee and Whipple creeks, there is no water quality information for Flume and Allen Canyon creeks.

The following bar charts show overall watershed health ratings from four perspectives. Approximately 90 percent of the watershed is not assessed using actual field testing. However, the watershed's land uses — fairly extensive rural and suburban residential areas — the lack of forests, and presence of I-5 suggest that streams will be in poor health.